



## Benjamin Franklin

**B**enjamin Franklin was born on January 17, 1706, in a four-room house on Milk Street in Boston. He was the fifteenth child of his father, Josiah, a maker and seller of soaps and candles. After he had attended school for just two years, 10-year-old Benjamin went to work in his father's shop. In his free time he liked to read, fish, go rowing, and swim. Inventive at an early age, he tried floating in a large pond while holding a stick attached to the string of a kite. On windy days, the kite pulled him quickly and smoothly through the water.



When he was 12, Benjamin became an **apprentice** to his brother James, who was a printer. He signed a contract in which he agreed to work without pay for eight years. In return, James agreed to provide him with a room, food, and training as a printer. Benjamin quickly mastered setting type and operating the heavy wooden printing press. At night after work and very early in the morning, he eagerly read book after book on a wide range of subjects.

In 1721 James started a newspaper called the *New England Courant*. The paper was a single sheet, printed on both sides, which included humorous letters to the editor written by James and his friends. To hide their identities, they signed their letters with **fictitious** names like Ichabod Henroost, Harry Meanwell, and Tabitha Talkative. Benjamin wanted to write for the *Courant*, too. One night he slipped a letter signed "Silence Dogood" under the door of the print shop. To his joy it was printed. He wrote 13 more of these letters in which he made fun of such things as drunkenness and women's hoop petticoats. By 1723, 17-year-old Benjamin was fed up with serving his brother who was often harsh and critical. Without a word to anyone, he ran off to Philadelphia where he found a room to rent and a paying job with a printer.

Just six years later, Benjamin owned his own print shop and newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. Both were soon very successful. In 1733 he launched his *Poor Richard's Almanack*, a yearly publication that included weather predictions, verses, helpful information, and wise sayings. Most of these sayings expressed basic truths ("Lost time is never found again") or were meant to advise ("Be slow to choose a friend, slower in changing"). Before long, his cleverly written almanac was one of the most popular publications in the American colonies.

By the time he was 42, Franklin was a wealthy man. He retired from his printing business, but continued to lead a full and productive life. Fascinated by science, he conducted experiments with electricity. He invented a musical instrument, signed the Declaration of Independence, and persuaded the French to aid America in the Revolutionary War. Still politically active at 81, he helped shape the new nation's Constitution. Printer, writer, scientist, inventor, statesman—this man, who accomplished so much, is one of the most important figures in America's history.



## COMPREHENSION CHECK



1. Which of these do you think was most likely one of Benjamin's tasks when he worked in his father's shop?
  - ☐ A. setting type
  - ☐ B. trimming wicks for the candles
  - ☐ C. selling newspapers to the customers
  - ☐ D. making and selling kites
2. An **apprentice** is someone who
  - ☐ A. makes predictions about the weather.
  - ☐ B. writes humorous letters to the editor.
  - ☐ C. works for little or no pay in exchange for training in a trade or craft.
  - ☐ D. experiments with electricity.
3. What was the name of the newspaper that was owned by James Franklin?
  - ☐ A. *Poor Richard's Almanack*
  - ☐ B. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*
  - ☐ C. *the New England Courant*
  - ☐ D. *the Boston News-Letter*
4. In paragraph three, it says that James and his friends signed their letters to the editor with **fictitious** names. Which of these is the best synonym for *fictitious*?
  - ☐ A. well-known
  - ☐ B. made-up
  - ☐ C. important
  - ☐ D. complicated
5. Why did Benjamin leave Boston in 1723?
  - ☐ A. He wanted more free time to read books.
  - ☐ B. He wanted to be a scientist.
  - ☐ C. He had completed the agreed-to period of time as his brother's apprentice.
  - ☐ D. He was tired of working for his strict brother.
6. One of the sayings in *Poor Richard's Almanack* was, "The sleeping fox catches no poultry." This saying advises against being
  - ☐ A. lazy.
  - ☐ B. hungry.
  - ☐ C. cowardly.
  - ☐ D. greedy.
7. "Lost \_\_\_\_\_ is never found again." Which of these words correctly completes this wise saying, which is quoted in this biography?
  - ☐ A. patience
  - ☐ B. courage
  - ☐ C. confidence
  - ☐ D. time
8. Which of these sentences states an **OPINION** about Benjamin Franklin?
  - ☐ A. He invented a musical instrument.
  - ☐ B. When he was 12, he became an apprentice to his brother James.
  - ☐ C. After he retired, he led a full and productive life.
  - ☐ D. He was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.